

**STATEMENT  
OF  
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VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

November 8, 2017

**Introduction**

Good Afternoon Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing. Although the Department of Labor (DOL or Department) was not a focus of the most recent Government Accountability Office engagement on transitioning service members and the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), we appreciate the opportunity to discuss the Department's work with the Departments of Defense (DoD), Veterans Affairs (VA), and other agency partners, to administer and improve TAP. As the Director of the Office of National Programs in the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) at DOL, my office is responsible for managing DOL's Employment Workshop (EW or Workshop) and Career Technical Training Track courses. As a recently retired (December 2016) soldier with a 35 year military career, I personally understand the importance of the transition process and TAP. Career transition is an important and stressful time for the transitioning service member, as well as the entire family. More broadly speaking, successful career transition is important to attracting an All-Volunteer Force, and to building the American economy. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss DOL's efforts to work with DoD and VA to administer TAP to transitioning service members and improvements that can be made to assist service members with their employment preparation as they transition to civilian life.

Secretary Acosta stands firmly behind our country's service members and veterans. He has set several clear goals that will assist our veterans in finding and retaining good jobs: (1) creating clear career pathways; (2) eliminating barriers to employment; (3) enabling and promoting apprenticeship opportunities that lead to meaningful careers; and (4) increasing the portability of licensing and credentials for military service members and their spouses.

Before the passage of the VOW to Hire Heroes Act in 2011, the veteran unemployment rate reached a high of 9.9 percent in January 2011, and Unemployment Compensation for Ex-service members (UCX) payments for the year totaled over \$728 million to nearly 90,000 individuals; with an average duration of UCX benefits payments of over 21 weeks. So far in 2017, veteran unemployment has averaged 3.7 percent, including a low of 3.0 percent in September 2017. Additionally, UCX payments and participants for the 12 months ending in August 2017 have dropped to approximately one-third of what they were in 2011, and the average number of weeks

that transitioning service members receive UCX benefits has also decreased to 18.9 weeks for the 29,000 recipients who received benefits from September through August. That is good news for all transitioning service members.

While there are still approximately 300,000 veterans who are unemployed, there are 6.1 million job openings. Transitioning service members and veterans can help to fill these jobs, and employers are eager to hire them. DOL will soon publish final regulations to implement the HIRE Vets Medallion program. This program will recognize companies that are successful in hiring and retaining our nation's veterans.

DOL helps employers build effective hiring and apprenticeship programs by overseeing a workforce system that connects transitioning service members and veterans to job opportunities and training, and we assist by providing the DOL Workshops to approximately 200,000 transitioning service members each year. The Workshops provide attendees with the information, knowledge, and tools needed to bridge the divide between a military and a civilian career.

### **Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshops**

TAP, as codified under 10 U.S.C. 1144, is a collaborative effort of the Departments of Labor, Veterans Affairs, Defense, Education, and Homeland Security (DHS), the Office of Personnel Management, and the Small Business Administration. TAP provides separating service members and their spouses with the training and support they need to transition successfully to the civilian workforce. Through TAP, DOL uses its extensive expertise in employment services to provide a comprehensive three-day Workshop at U.S. military installations around the world.

Since the Department began providing the Workshop over 25 years ago, the number of workshops, participants, and locations has grown considerably. In 2003, TAP was expanded to overseas military installations, and, in 2005, courses were offered to returning members of the Reserve and National Guard via the 30, 60, and 90-day Yellow Ribbon Reintegration programs. In 2011, the VOW Act was passed, which among other things, made participation in the DOL EW mandatory for most transitioning service members, including those demobilizing from the National Guard and Reserve Components.

Last year, DOL conducted more than 6,400 Workshops for over 180,000 participants at 187 sites worldwide. Of the over 180,000 participants, more than 7,000 were National Guard and Reserve. The 3-day DOL EW is standardized so that all attending service members and their spouses receive the same high level of instruction. The course consists of three days of classroom instruction that is tightly focused on four core competencies:

- Developing and executing a job search plan that's career focused;
- Planning for success in the civilian work environment;
- Creating resumes, cover letters, and other self-marketing materials; and
- Engaging in successful interviews and networking conversations.

In compliance with the VOW Act, the Department initiated a significant redesign of the DOL EW to make it more engaging and relevant in light of the unique challenges facing transitioning

service members. This was an extensive process that involved numerous pilots, evaluations, and feedback from reviewers and agency partners. In addition, the VOW Act required that DOL use contract facilitators to ensure a standardized, high-quality professional cadre of facilitators. DOL monitors the performance of the facilitators through the review of Transition GPS Participant Assessment results, regular site assessments by DOL federal field staff, and input from DoD and military services stakeholders.

In FY 2017, the interagency partners collected and analyzed assessment results regarding participants' satisfaction with the TAP curriculum and delivery methods. Assessment results indicated that 96 percent of participants reported that they would use what they had learned in their own transition planning. The data suggests that the DOL EW is meeting the expectations of its participants. But we recognize that isn't enough, so we work with our partners, and with industry experts, to continually refine the curriculum, the methods of delivery, and the electronic resources available to give transitioning service members the best opportunity for a successful career transition.

VETS completed the implementation of the revised DOL EW curriculum in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016. This revision incorporated extensive input from TAP stakeholders, including military transition services personnel, transitioning service members, private sector employers, and Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs). The result is an employment workshop focused on the four competencies noted above. Additionally, in FY 2016, VETS conducted a technical review of the curriculum in accordance with the TAP Curriculum Working Group's two-year review cycle. The purpose of the technical review was to ensure that the content, data, and web sites used in the curriculum were accurate and up-to-date.

DOL has awarded a contract for an independent evaluation of the TAP program. The evaluation will include a quasi-experimental design to analyze the impacts of the TAP DOL EW on employment-related outcomes for separating military service members. It will also involve a small pilot to evaluate differential impacts of behavioral intervention approaches for connecting separating service members to American Job Centers (AJCs).

The interagency performance management working group is also reviewing long-term outcome measures that may be used to assess the impact of TAP. These include a variety of unemployment and labor force statistics. Many of these measures will require data sharing efforts, or possibly legislative changes, to allow access to information across agencies.

Based on a data agreement between Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) and DOL, at this time last year, we began to receive E-form (i.e., DD Form 2648) data from DMDC on transitioning service members. Transitioning service members are given the opportunity to opt into receiving information from DOL. Since that time DOL has sent approximately 150,000 emails to transitioning service members to connect them with employment and training resources. DOL will continue to analyze the data and to work with stakeholders to leverage Veterans' Data Exchange Initiative in a manner that can positively impact employment outcomes.

### **Veterans Employment Initiative Task Force for a Career-Ready Military**

In 2011, the Veterans Employment Initiative (VEI) Task Force was established to ensure the career readiness of transitioning service members. The Task Force consists of joint representation from DOL, DoD, VA, DHS (U.S. Coast Guard), the Department of Education, the Small Business Administration, and the Office of Personnel Management. The Task Force designed a plan to strengthen and build upon the existing TAP curriculum, which is now known as Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success). To continue this important collaboration, the TAP Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) provides an interagency governance framework. There are five interagency working groups (transition assistance, curriculum, IT/data sharing, performance management, and strategic communications) that report to the Senior Steering Group (SSG). The SSG meets monthly to ensure the program is operating as intended by statute. The SSG reports to the Executive Council (EC), which meets quarterly. The EC, SSG, and all of the working groups are represented by each interagency partner. The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), DOL, and VA serve as co-chairs of each of the groups—with the lead chair rotating annually. In FY 2018, DOL is the host.

Transition GPS: Under the current interagency MOU, the supporting agencies have a greater sense of their roles and responsibilities in support of Transition GPS, which now includes four basic components to help service members prepare for separation and meet their career readiness standards: (1) Pre-Separation/ Transition Counseling; (2) Transition GPS Core Curriculum; (3) additional Career Specific training tracks; and (4) Capstone.

Pre-Separation/ Transition Counseling: Through the current transition program, transitioning service members receive individual counseling to discuss their career goals and start their transition process. Each service member is introduced to the programs and services available to them during their transition and begins to develop an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) that documents his or her personal transition, as well as the deliverables he or she must attain to meet the new transition program's Career Readiness Standards.

Transition GPS Core Curriculum: The Transition GPS Core Curriculum includes a financial planning seminar, VA Benefits Briefings, the DOL Employment Workshop, and other modules. Transitioning service members also use a Military Occupational Code Crosswalk to translate their military skills, training, and experience into civilian occupations, credentials, and employment.

Additional Career-Specific Training Tracks: Service members also have the opportunity to participate in a series of two-day tailored tracks within the Transition GPS curriculum: (1) an Accessing High Education Track (provided by DoD), for those pursuing a higher education degree; (2) a Career Technical Training Track (CTTT) (provided by DOL), for those interested in obtaining job-ready skills through apprenticeship or other industry-recognized credentials; and (3) the "Boots to Business" Entrepreneurship Track (provided by SBA), for those wanting to start a business.

In April 2017, the Department assumed responsibility for the TAP CTTT. This is aligned with the Secretary's emphasis on apprenticeship, and the President's recent Executive Order 13801, Expanding Apprenticeships in America. CTTT is an additional two-day workshop focused on

apprenticeships and industry-recognized credentials for transitioning service members and their spouses. The CTTT provides these service members with an opportunity to identify their relevant skills, increase their awareness of training and apprenticeship programs that can lead to industry-recognized credentials and meaningful careers, and develop an action plan to achieve their career goals. The Department is also undertaking a comprehensive review of the CTTT curriculum, and has reached out to employers, industry associations, and other stakeholders, asking for participation in the examination of both the DOL EW and the CTTT offerings. Their valuable input will help to ensure the curricula are up-to-date and relevant to the dynamic employer and industry standards. As with the TAP EW, DOL has sought input from a range of industry experts and expects to implement a revised CTTT curriculum in early 2018.

Capstone: Before their separation from the military, service members participate in a Capstone event, which requires that the transitioning service member's chain-of-command verify that he or she has completed the VOW Act requirements and achieved Career Readiness Standards. Service members who require additional assistance will be referred to supplemental training opportunities. In addition, through the Capstone event, service members will be offered, as needed, a "warm handover" to appropriate federal, state, and local government agencies, such as the AJCs.

SkillBridge: The Department also works with our partners at DoD to support their SkillBridge initiative, which works to offer civilian job training to transitioning service members. Service members who meet certain qualifications can participate in civilian job and employment training, including pre-apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and internships in their last 180 days of active duty. Secretary Acosta is interested in increasing employer access to transitioning service members through SkillBridge and other employer sponsored programs. We will work with DoD and employers to increase these opportunities. Tremendous potential exists for service members, companies, trade unions, and others to leverage this DoD authority and facilitate a smooth transition from active duty to civilian employment.

### **DOL Support for Non-Optimal Transition**

When a service member is assessed as not meeting Career Readiness Standards during their Capstone event, their commander facilitates a "warm handover" of the service member to the public workforce system for a review of the employment services available through AJCs and to facilitate access to individualized career services. This warm handover can be accomplished by introducing the service member to a local AJC staff member (on or near the military base), connecting them to the AJC nearest their eventual destination, or through a facilitated call from the service member to the DOL Toll-Free Help Line (1-877-US2-JOBS or 1-877-872-5627). Service members that do not meet career readiness standards are allowed to receive services from a Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists at the AJCs, regardless of disability status or other significant barriers to employment. DVOP specialists, authorized under 38 U.S.C. 4103A, are funded throughout 54 states and territories through DOL's Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) program and provide intensive services to eligible veterans and eligible spouses. JVSG also provides funding for Local Veterans' Employment Representatives staff members who provide a wide range of services on behalf of our veterans specifically related

to outreach to the employer community and facilitation within the state's employment service delivery system.

American Job Centers: Most of the Department's employment programs and services are available through the nationwide network of nearly 2,400 AJCs. The AJCs serve as the cornerstone for the Nation's workforce investment system and provide a range of services locally, including counseling, resume writing workshops, job skills assessments, occupational training, on-the-job training, apprenticeships, and job placement services. Last year, more than 13 million Americans, including almost one million veterans (including National Guard and Reserve), received employment assistance through AJCs. Additionally, Section 2 of the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002, as codified at 38 U.S.C. 4215, established "Priority of Service" for veterans, which allows veterans and their eligible spouses to receive priority access to workforce training programs directly funded, in whole or in part, by DOL. The Department is committed to providing Priority of Service for veterans and eligible spouses.

Unemployment Compensation for Ex-service Members: The Department also oversees the UCX program, which provides benefits for eligible ex-military personnel. The program is administered by the States as agents of the Federal government. To qualify for UCX, an individual must have been on active duty with a branch of the U.S. military and discharged under honorable conditions. There is no payroll deduction from service members' wages for unemployment insurance protection. Benefits are paid for by the various branches of the military, or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The law of the State (under which the claim is filed) determines benefit amounts, number of weeks benefits can be paid, and other eligibility conditions. Transitioning service members that receive UCX are eligible to be enrolled in state Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) programs to assist them in gaining employment.

To further support UCX beneficiaries during their transition to civilian employment, the Department has leveraged the RESEA grant program. RESEA grants provide states with additional funding for in-person reemployment services at AJCs, such as career and labor market information, development or update of an individual reemployment plan, orientation to AJC services, referrals to additional resources, and a review of each participant's continued UCX or Unemployment Insurance (UI) eligibility. RESEA is an evidenced-based strategy targeted to individuals identified as likely to exhaust UI benefits. Since 2015, the Department has directed participating states to provide RESEA services to UCX beneficiaries to the greatest extent feasible. The 2018 Budget includes a proposal that would expand RESEA to serve 50 percent of all UI beneficiaries most likely to exhaust benefits, as well as all UCX beneficiaries.

### **Priorities Moving Forward:**

DOL EW Participation Timeline and Curriculum Update: VETS has been working with our partners on the TAP SSG to better address transitioning service members' needs. For the past several years, the focus of the TAP SSG has been the requirements of the VOW Act. The TAP SSG has also begun focusing on the timing of the delivery of TAP. Although many transitioning service members are attending TAP within 90 days of separation, and as early as two years out for retirees, we believe, in line with DoD's policy, that to the greatest extent possible,

transitioning service members should attend TAP much earlier. In our view, TAP should be delivered as much as one year prior to scheduled separation for transitioning service members, and as early as two years prior to separations for retirees to allow for participation in supplemental courses, financial planning, resume development, networking, career research and access to other opportunities like DoD's SkillBridge.

During FY 2017, the TAP Interagency Curriculum Working Group conducted an in-depth review of all the curricula modules, including the DOL EW and CTTT. As part of the in-depth review process, DOL distributed the DOL EW and CTTT curricula materials to over 40 internal and external stakeholders providing them an opportunity to review the material and respond with input. The stakeholder group included the TAP Interagency partners, employers, VSOs, the US Chamber of Commerce, Society of Human Resource Managers, and the National Association of State Workforce Agencies. Based on feedback received, DOL is updating the DOL EW curriculum to improve organization, remove some outdated practices, improve the LinkedIn Profile section, and to emphasize the importance of taking advantage of the additional Transition GPS tracks – Accessing Higher Education, Entrepreneurship track, and CTTT. The Department's intent is to highlight how it is in the interest of the transitioning service member to take a career approach by obtaining a degree, industry recognized credential(s), or an apprenticeship.

CTTT Participation Increase and Curriculum Update: As the responsible agency for CTTT, the Department will work with interagency partners to increase CTTT participation. In addition, VETS, with the assistance of the Department's Employment and Training Administration's Office of Apprenticeship, is significantly revising the CTTT curriculum. The new curriculum will place increased emphasis on apprenticeships as a path to sustainable, high paying careers. The revised CTTT curriculum will cover four themes: (1) Personal Assessment using three assessment tools; (2) Research into specific career fields of interest; (3) Understanding training requirements and identifying training opportunities; and (4) Establishing goals and develop a detailed plan to achieve those goals.

Veterans' Data Exchange Initiative, the TAP Mobile Application, and Evaluations: In November 2016, VETS began the data transfer process from the Defense Manpower Data Center for the Veterans' Data Exchange Initiative (VDEI). The overall intent of this initiative is to allow the Department to gain a better understanding of transitioning service members, which will allow VETS to better prepare the Department's services for individuals transitioning out of the military. VETS is tracking data elements such as race/ ethnicity, gender, military occupation, and other demographic information for approximately 200,000 transitioning service members each year. Partnering with DOL's Chief Evaluation Office, VETS is examining the VDEI data to determine how the data can be used to analyze employment outcomes for transitioning service members and improve our service delivery. Currently, based on E-form data sent to DOL from DMDC, VETS sends emails to transitioning service members to highlight the importance of participating in the DOL EW as early as possible to provide employment tools that support the transition process.

The Department has initiated development of a TAP mobile application (app). The purpose of this app is to provide online tools for transitioning service members in a format that is accessible

from a smartphone. The app will provide access to a full suite of the CareerOneStop mobile tools, and will include DOL TAP course materials. Additionally, the app will provide transition checklists and automated notifications.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, our long-term goal continues to be for the nation as a whole to recognize military service as a path to high-quality civilian careers. The future of the country's All-Volunteer Force depends upon this recognition, as does our economy. The Department recognizes employment as possibly the most important element of a successful transition to civilian life. The Department thanks the Congress for addressing TAP participation through the VOW Act, and for your continued partnership in removing barriers to employment.

Today, the Department remains committed to working with our interagency partners to continuously review and improve TAP curricula, including the DOL EW and CTTT, through our regular review cycle that incorporates input from employers and best practices across the nation.

Moving ahead, we look forward to preparing transitioning service members and their spouses even more effectively by improving the timeliness of DOL EW participation and increasing participation rates in the supplementary career-related tracks.

The Department looks forward to working with the Subcommittee to ensure that our separating service members have the resources and training they need to successfully transition to the civilian workforce. The improving employment situation for veterans is a resounding testament to the nationwide response from stakeholders, both public and private, at the national level and even within the local communities. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my written statement. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this hearing. I welcome your questions.